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ORIT DE LA CIOSL

ORGANIZATION [truncated]
INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION [truncated]

PRESIDENT DICK MARTIN, CLC – CANADA

February 1999

Our Ref.:

To the
President of the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the Participation of
Civil Society
C/o Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society)
CEPAL
1825 K Street NW, Suite 1120
Washington, D.C. 20006
Fax: (202) 296-0826
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Dear Sir or Madam:

On behalf and representation of the more than 45 million male and female workers of the Americas that comprise the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores de la Confederación Internacional de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres (ORIT de la CIOSL) [Regional Inter-American Organization of Workers of the International Confederation of Free Union Organizations], I am writing to you for the purpose of presenting our observations regarding the public invitation to components of civil society to submit documents related to the ALCA process, which are supposed refer to commercial elements.

It is unfortunate that certain governments of the countries of the Americas are opposed to the real participation of civil society in the ALCA process. For several years, the ORIT and its affiliated and fraternal organizations have been insisting, among other things, on recognition of the Union Court that has been functioning since 1995. The governments have indeed recognized the Business Court, in an exclusionary position which does not comport with democratic stances.

Starting last year, however, civil society had some hope that said exclusionary stage had been superseded, with the establishment of the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society.

Said hope did not last long, when in Buenos Aires, in the Meeting of Vice Ministers of the ALCA, some governments openly opposed said Committee having a truly participatory and democratic nature.

Suspecting that that would be the position, we went ahead and presented to the governments our proposal for operation of the referenced Committee, consisting of:

- 1-That the Committee's operations should be continental in scope.
- 2-That the participation of the governments in the Committee should be such that it guarantees that its decisions are duly implemented.
- 3-That the governments provide the information necessary and sufficient regarding all issues discussed in the negotiations among the countries, in order to enable effective participation.
- 4-That public hearings be held, both to request and receive the points of view of the male and female participants.
- 5-That the Committee conveys these viewpoints precisely and impartially.
- 6-That the reports of the Committee be public and be the subject of comments and contributions of the sectors of civil society that participate in the process.
- 7-That the Committee progresses towards negotiation groups for considering specific issues, as would be the case with normal labor and environmental rules.
- 8-That the Business Court approach the Committee, in order not to have a privileged position, which is unacceptable discrimination against other sectors of the civil society.

None of these points has been taken into account, much less those that relate to the capacity of participation of the civil society. To be honest, we think that the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the participation of Civil Society in the ALCA has been reduced to a kind of suggestion box, where the organizations of civil society do not have the slightest opportunity to follow-up on the proposals presented, much less have sufficient and timely information about the negotiations among the countries.

More serious still, the invitation restricts us to presenting our points of view regarding "commercial elements related to the ALCA process," when we all know that those "commercial elements" have profound implications on social and labor issues and matters pertaining to the environment.

The obdurate commercialism of the ALCA is contradicted by the presidential initiative of the MERCOSUR countries, which in December of last year produced a Social-Labor Declaration which, although it does not meet the requirements that we aspire to, starts to recognize a social-labor dimension. Various sub-regional processes already rely on entities such as the Economic and Social Consultation Forum or the Andean Labor Council.

For our part, given the situation of impediments to the real participation of civil society in the ALCA process, we shall continue using the resources that are within our reach, together with the other democratic sectors of our societies, so that the ALCA process may be transparent, participatory and democratic. We are not going to be accomplices to the negative consequences that the exclusively commercial vision of the elites in the ALCA countries can entail.

Without other matters to discuss, we send you our regards with all due respect.

/s/ [illegible]

LUIS ANDERSON

SECRETARY GENERAL ATL CIOSL/ORIT

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